

[Programs](#)

[Med School Education](#)

[Secondary Education](#)

[Policy Maker Education](#)

[Sustaining Life](#)

[Climate Change Futures](#)

[Healthy Ocean, Healthy Humans](#)

[Healthy and Sustainable Food](#)

[Harvard Community Garden](#)

[Eating for Your Health and the Environment](#)

[New England Seasonal Guide](#)

[Mid-Atlantic Seasonal Guide](#)

[Scientists and Evangelicals](#)

[Initiative](#)

[Archives](#)

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Healthy and Sustainable Food

Sweet Corn

DATES AVAILABLE:

New England: July through September

Mid-Atlantic: July through mid-October

BRIEF DESCRIPTION:

Corn (*Zea Mays*, Gramineae) has a rich history upon which many American cultures were based. Originating in Mexico, where it was called maize, between 3,500 and 7,000 B.C.E., it has been a staple in North America since about 800 C.E. Tough field, or dent corn is the most important commercial type cultivated and is used as a grain for livestock feed and in some foods. Sweet corn, which ranks second in commercial importance, has been bred for tenderness and sweetness on the cob. Depending on variety, sweet corn kernels are crunchy, smooth, and juicy.



Corn ears grow on stalks, and are covered by layers of outer leaves, (collectively called the husk), which are pale green. A layer of opaque silky strings, aptly called corn silk, are the remains of tiny tubes that carry pollen to each of the flowers of corn, turning them into kernels. The kernels line the cob in rows and are the edible part of the plant. Kernels are commonly yellow or white and are found on the cob in either pure or mixed colors (bicolor). Sugar levels, corn flavor and the longevity of sweet corn is genetically controlled. Sweetness of different types can be categorized as sugary, sugary enhanced and supersweet. All sweet corn is classified by its genetic background.

VARIETIES:

"Temptation," one of the most popular sweet corns, has narrow 7-inch ears, with sweet bicolor kernels. **"Tuxedo"** is a rich sweet yellow corn with slightly larger 8-inch ears. **"Silver Queen"** is a late maturing, large-eared sweet white corn with a creamy texture. **"Fleet"** bicolor corn is quite sweet, grows 7 ½ inch ears, and is available early in the season. **"Precious Gem"** and **"Delectable"** are bicolor sweet corns with full 8-inch ears that grow well in colder climates. **"Cohasset"** is an 8-inch bicolor ear that is a favorite in taste tests for its balance of sweetness with a distinct corn flavor.

USING CORN:

When shopping for corn at the local market, be sure it has been kept cool and out of direct light as these speed the conversion of sugars to starch. Choose moist, firmly wrapped corn with intact husks and silks. Check the kernels by pulling the husk and silk away from the top of the ear and press kernel. Fresh corn kernels will be plump and juicy and when punctured, ooze milky liquid. Refrigerate immediately and use as quickly as possible to maintain sweetness.

Corn has many uses. It can be grilled, baked, or steamed in its husk, or the husk and silk can be removed for steaming, boiling, or roasting. Corn can be eaten directly off the cob, undressed or with a light coating of butter. Corn can also be cut off the cob for use in casseroles, side dishes, soups and stews, or sautéed with other fresh vegetables. Raw corn kernels can be added to salads, salsas, and guacamole. Be sure not to overcook corn as it quickly becomes tough and loses flavor.

NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION:

Corn is rich in vitamins and minerals, but because of its starch content, is also higher in calories and fat than many other vegetables. Every cup serving of cooked corn provides about 130 calories and 1.8 grams of fat. It is rich in thiamin, and a good source of fiber, protein, vitamin C, niacin, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium, and folate. Corn also contains yellow carotenoid pigments, including zeaxanthin, one of the two main eye-protecting antioxidants.

STORAGE:

General: For best flavor, corn should be eaten the day of purchase. Although it needs to be kept cool if stored, refrigeration decreases the flavor. If refrigeration is necessary, leave the husks intact and store in a plastic bag for no more than one to two days. If stored at temperatures greater than 86°F corn can lose more than 50% of its sugar in a single day.

Freezing: Corn can be frozen after blanching, up to one year on the cob or two to three months if the kernels are cut off the cob. Remove husk and silk, and briefly boil or steam the corn on the cob. Place whole cobs, or kernels removed from the cob, in airtight containers and freeze.

Canning: Corn can be canned in whole kernel or cream style in a pressure canner. Corn can also be made into relish and stored in jars.